

Windsor Castle

Windsor Castle is one of England's largest, containing thirteen acres within its walls. It has enjoyed favor as a royal residence from Norman times to the present and is the only royal castle to have made the transition to palace. Most monarchs have contributed in some way to its splendor and every century except the eighteenth has left its mark on the fabric. The result is a magnificent but extremely mutilated stronghold.

The castle owes its position to William the Conqueror. He chose the elevated site on a chalk cliff above the Thames in 1067 and his earthworks have since dictated the layout of the castle. Although raised on the grand scale, Windsor is a typical motte and bailey fortress, with two baileys or wards of roughly equal size on either side of a motte fifty feet high.

The west front has three D-shaped towers, named Curfew, Salisbury and Garter. Henry VIII rebuilt the gatehouse leading into the lower ward in 1510. The heavily restored Henry III and Edward III towers rising at the foot of the motte were built in the thirteenth century. Five Norman flanking towers also remain - the York, Augusta, Clarence, Chester and Prince of Wales towers. Mural towers were by no means a new invention, but Windsor's are spaced closely enough to methodically flank the curtain. These simple square towers may be compared with the round towers flanking Windsor's west front to appreciate the progress of fifty years.

The route towards the upper ward passes the Winchester Tower overlooking the river.

At the foot of the motte is the so-called Norman Gate which leads from the lower ward into the upper. This gatehouse has the veneer of newness characteristic of all the castle's defenses, but the vault of the gate passage, the porticullis and one of the twin flanking towers go back to Edward III's reign in 1359.